

THE NORTHWEST CURRENT

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Protecting D.C.'s trees

Picture driving along Massachusetts Avenue or MacArthur Boulevard, Lowell Street or Loughboro Road. What do you see? For many, the tall willow oak trees lining and sometimes arcing over the roadways come to mind — and it's a pretty picture indeed. But according to the nonprofit Restore Mass Ave, an insect invasion may be threatening these leafy vistas.

The oak lecanium scale extracts sap from a tree's vascular system, weakening the host to the point that it can succumb from disease. Restore Mass Ave, which has been researching the insect and its impacts, is taking action: It has funded treatment of a dozen oaks on Embassy Row, and is urging residents and officials to follow suit in order to protect trees elsewhere.

But the D.C. Urban Forestry Administration has a slightly different take. City arborist Kasey Yturalde says her agency is keeping an eye on the scale and has reported a recent increase to the U.S. Forest Service, which is funding further study. But she said D.C. typically does not treat oaks for scale, because the insects serve as a "food source for other organisms." She said the agency has found the trees can withstand some infestation, but that officials will study the current situation to determine what action is needed.

We appreciate the efforts of both the local activists and the city officials, but especially applaud the work done by Restore Mass Ave. We hope the outcome will be continued protection of these majestic trees. We'd like to reap their benefits for many decades to come.